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ABSTRACT

This report describes self-administered exercises on management and organizational development that emphasize a participative approach in small groups. The Program of Exercises (PEX), an integrated set of exercises, incorporates case study, role playing, programed instruction, and sensitivity training. The training provides a series of experiences relevant to personal growth, team building, and organizational development. PEX participants have possessed wide ranges of work and cultural backgrounds. (Author/JF)

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USE OF MANAGEMENT TRAINING SIMULATIONS IN A UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

THE PROGRAM OF EXERCISES FOR MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Presented at AASA, 103rd Annual Convention
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I – INTRODUCTION

By way of introducing the Program of Exercises to you, I would like to touch on 4 main points: (1) The educational aims of the program (2) Instructional requirements (3) Special aids to the learnings and (4) The exercises themselves.

The Program of Exercises (which we call PEX) was first published at the University of Pittsburgh in 1965 by Dr. Bernard Bass and Dr. James Vaughan. Since that time the original ten exercises have been increased to 15, and have undergone extensive testing, development and application both in the U.S. and in some 30 countries throughout the world.

PEX has been designed to provide a series of experiences relevant to personal growth, team building, and organizational development. Participants from a wide range of work as well as cultural backgrounds have benefited from PEX. Some examples of these are: government agency administrators, Catholic nuns, top, middle and lower level industrial managers and university students from a broad array of academic disciplines.

PEX is an integrated set of experiences that incorporate many of the elements of case study, role playing, programmed instruction, and sensitivity training.

These exercises are self-administering in small groups. Likewise, their analyses are self-guided. Students have all the materials in their booklet necessary to carry out each exercise and its analysis; however, the exercises are of greater learning value with the help of an instructor. No particular direction is required of him, but his presence is vital for preparing students for the experience generated by the exercise and for helping students to see the implications for learning of what they are doing.

I want to stress at the outset that the exercises do not provide textbook answers. The student will come out of a PEX experience not so much with new knowledge of rights and wrongs, but rather with fresh insights into the consequences of his own behavior in certain situations.

II – EDUCATIONAL AIMS OF THE PROGRAM

Lecture, reading, and discussion alone may suffice for purely cognitive learning, but are not likely to influence interpersonal relations or change socioemotional work orientations. Firmly held beliefs, preferences and values about motivation, supervision, communication and decision-making can be changed when people are asked to take roles which are not entirely in keeping with what they now believe. A contrast is created between their values and the reinforcements of the task situations. For instance, students begin the program believing that profits are the only real objective of any business firm. But EXERCISE OBJECTIVES requires them to make five business decisions and to examine what goals they had in mind when they made those decisions. It soon becomes clear

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that many different objectives requiring balanced judgments are involved. Merely reading or listening to the argument favoring the position that business has many objectives is unlikely to be as convincing as the brief experience in this exercise.

The exercises most importantly create hard-to-forget experiences which make subsequent readings and discussion more tangible and which may help to maintain more effective ways of behaving long after the course has ended. For example, in EXERCISE LIFE GOALS the student is likely to see himself projecting his own values on others. He may already have some familiarity with the phenomenon of projection, but is unlikely to have been aware of how much he is guilty of it himself. At some future date, this easily-recalled experience may serve to reduce his likelihood of projecting and increase his empathy in his evaluations of others.

These examples from two of the exercises point out two specific elements we have hoped to impart to the student by using the experiential learning model. These two elements are the importance of feedback and content vs. process.

First, PEX stresses the importance of feedback to the learning process. We learn from more than just experience. We learn by exposing the patterns of our behavior in a situation where we can get back clear and accurate information from others about the relevance and effectiveness of our behavior. We need a feedback system which consistently operates so that we can modify and correct that which is inappropriate for us and for others.

This feedback mechanism is a part of all the exercises and is particularly apparent in EXERCISE FISHBOWL where two groups take turns observing each other's process and then reporting on what they saw. The various ways in which a group will accept comments about its operation is one piece of learning here. For example, even the most uncohesive group will typically react to negative feedback from outsiders by immediately taking on at least the appearance of cohesion and attacking the critic in unison.

The second crucial element of the experiential learning model is the difference between content and process in the social situations in the exercises. The focus of each exercise is much less on the content of subject matter being dealt with than it is on the process of what goes on between students in the group learning environment created by the exercise. For example, in EXERCISE NEGOTIATIONS the specific issues presented for the simulated union-management bargaining situation are far less important than the attention focused on the strategies and techniques two people will employ to resolve conflict between the groups they represent.

Summarizing the PEX learning goals: each exercise directs learning towards individuals, groups, and organizations. Benefits to the individual are increased self-awareness, heightened social sensitivity, and sharpened professional skills. Learnings that relate to groups center on person-to-person relationships, consensual decision-making, and observation of group processes. At the organizational level, the learnings concern goal-seeking behavior, intergroup relations and organizational strategy.

III – INSTRUCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The exercises can be applied in a wide variety of educational situations. Similarly, they are subject to any of several modifications in design and administration. Because of this often tested flexibility, we have had the opportunity to evaluate the instructional requirements of PEX in many diverse settings. This experience has emphasized to us that the PEX instructor must be attuned to the five following concerns:

1. If the immediate experience for students does not "fit" the context of related or back-home experiences, the relevance of the exercise will not be seen.

2. If the trainee is a rigid person and deals too defensively with challenges to his old habits or beliefs, he may place the blame on the exercise, the instructor, the group or somewhere else, and not on himself.

3. If the trainer is not well-prepared to handle the mechanics of the exercise smoothly and deal with interpersonal issues raised in the discovery and interpretation steps, trainees will feel dissatisfied.

4. If too many exercises are run consecutively, there is little chance to digest their implications or, if insufficient time is scheduled for an exercise, the trainees will be left with a sense of frustration and incompleteness. In line with this, the importance of discussion and critique sessions following the exercises should not be underestimated.

5. If the group's results do not match the expected outcome, it is essential that the trainer deal directly with this fact and not avoid it by calling it "the exception that proves the rule". The trainer can indicate what usually happens and guide the discussion into an analysis of why it worked differently in this situation.

IV – SPECIAL AIDS TO PEX LEARNINGS

We have developed three special aids to PEX learnings. They are a book of related readings, multi-exercise workshops, and the research generated by past PEX experiences.

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES FOR MANAGING ORGANIZATIONS

The experiential learnings coming out of the exercises are heightened and broadened in scope by readings in the companion textbook, Current Perspectives for Managing Organizations, recently published by Prentice-Hall. We designed Current Perspectives so that at least four readings were included that directly relate to the questions raised in each of the exercises. The book makes a particularly meaningful contribution when its readings are woven into the design of multi-exercise PEX workshops.

PEX WORKSHOPS

These workshops have been designed by INSTAD to give special emphasis to certain topics of relevance for interpersonal and organizational behavior. The most recently designed PEX workshops include those working towards building effective work teams, managing conflict, building supervisory skills, and initiating personal growth and development.

COMPARATIVE PEX RESEARCH

The exercises were prepared primarily to provide experience-based learning in organizational psychology. They were also designed with their research potentials in mind.

The exercise booklets were constructed so that copies of all vital student responses to the exercises can be collected by the instructor. These responses are anonymous, but participants are asked to provide certain biographical data on a standard form to increase the research alternatives. Exercise data from throughout the world is collected, stored, and analyzed in the data bank of the Management Research Center of the University of Rochester. The Management Research Center is the coordinator of the information system, known as the International Research Groups on Management (IRGOM), which was created to both collect and disseminate this data enabling cross-cultural comparisons of individual and organizational behavior.

Once organized, any exercise protocols from any population in any country are available for the instructor's use. Many users of the exercises find comparisons between their own responses and those from other settings or cultures to be fascinating. Other benefits from the data bank result from the wide dissemination of research on the data initiated within IRGOM. This research has taken the form of a technical report series and also appears in various books and scientific and professional journals.

V – THE EXERCISES IN BRIEF

Typically, a group of from 20 – 30 students are trained by one instructor. The actual exercises are taken by sub-groups of five or six participants.

An exercise can be completed in a two or three hour session or spread out in two or three sessions of one hour.

Most of the exercises follow a common pattern. First the participants read a small amount of background information and individually make a set of decisions or recommend a solution for the problem presented. Next they meet in small groups and reach a consensus solution to the same problem. They then look back at the exprience and do a process analysis of their problem solving behavior both as individuals and as a group. Following this they meet with other work groups and the instructor in one assembly to share experiences.

The titles and brief descriptions of the exercises which were a part of the program at West Virginia University are:

1. EXERCISE OBJECTIVES: Examines the goals of organizations and demonstrates that any manager is a "system's balancer" working in a complex environment which impresses multiple objectives upon him.

2. EXERCISE ATTITUDES: Provides an opportunity for participants to express and share with others their concerns about the learning experience to follow; gives the trainer a chance to locate and deal with specific participant concerns with the learning experience.

4. EXERCISE LIFE GOALS: Examines life goals which have direct relevance for individual differences in motivation and job preferences; provides practice in giving and receiving feedback about impressions formed during the learning experience.

5. EXERCISE SUPERVISE: Provides participants with some experiential data on the consequences of various supervisor behavioral styles on worked productivity and job satisfaction; explores the implications of certain subordinate attitudes in the supervisor-subordinate relationship.

6. EXERCISE FISHBOWL: Demonstrates that the degree to which a group functions effectively is determined by such variables as mutual trust, shared responsibilities, similarity of purpose, and full utilization of resources.

7. EXERCISE ORGANIZATION: Explores the problems of developing and executing plans in large organizations – especially under conditions where the "planners" are not the "doers"; focuses on the implications of intergroup competition and rivalry in organizations.

8. EXERCISE COMMUNICATION: Demonstrates the advantages and disadvantages of one-way vs. two-way communication; accounts for the differences between effective and ineffective communication.

10. EXERCISE EVALUATION: Gives the participant a chance to review and evaluate the entire training course in which he is involved using two methods: an intuitive approach and a systematic, rational analysis; provides the trainer with a detailed appraisal of the effectiveness of the program.

11. EXERCISE SELF–APPRAISAL: Provides each participant with the opportunity to assess his own behavior in three areas: personal style of learning, personal style of relating to others, and management style; permits each participant to check with others to see if his self-perceptions are consistent with others' perceptions of his behavior.

SUMMARY

In summary, the things that set the exercises apart from other learning experiences are:

1. They borrow from several learning models: case study, role playing, programmed instruction, sensitivity training.

2. They emphasize the experiential, participative approach to learning.

3. They provide insights into behavior rather than textbook answers to technical issues.

4. Their effect is heightened by other teaching aids: Current Perspectives for Managing Organizations, multi-exercise workshops, PEX comparative research.

5. They make challenging demands on the instructor, but offer him great flexibility in designing the learning environment.